

Mayor brings forward £12 million plans for boost Teesworks transport links

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Tees Valley Mayor Ben Houchen is set to bring proposals for an £11.7million investment to boost road and rail links to the Teesworks site to the Combined Authority Cabinet tomorrow (2 July).

The cash will be used to part-fund improvements to make sure that getting to and from the UK's largest Freeport for both freight and people is as smooth and easy as possible.

Work is needed to deliver improvements on the Eaglescliffe to Northallerton rail line, where low bridges and tunnels currently restrict the size of cargo containers that can be used. A project would see two tunnels and two bridges improved so that larger containers can use the more direct route heading south to the East Coast Main Line.

The A66 provides a key east-west connection between Teesport and the A19 and the A1(M), and is used by more than 70,000 vehicles a day on its busiest sections. Funding here would be used to upgrade parts of the route to make it fit for the future.

If approved by the Combined Authority Cabinet on Friday, £11.7million would be used as a local

contribution to these key schemes, with the remaining funding being sought from a £20million bid to Government's Levelling Up fund and a £1.5million contribution from Middlesbrough Council.

Mayor Houchen said: "We have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to transform the Teesworks site and create thousands of good-quality, well-paid jobs for local people for generations to come. We're already forging ahead with investment, with the likes of GE Renewable Energy bringing its mammoth offshore wind turbine blade manufacturing facility to the UK's biggest Freeport, and that's just the tip of the iceberg.

"But in capitalising on the Freeport and to make sure it really turbocharges our economy, we can't be let down by poor transport links. We'll be seeing a massive amount of activity on the site over the coming years and it's vital that businesses which want to base themselves there will have the first-class connectivity they deserve.

"We also need to ensure these are fit for the future and able to cope with the increasing freight and workers, so local people can be sure of a reliable, fast and efficient transport network. These improvements, alongside all of our other schemes such as upgrading Darlington and Middlesbrough train stations, will do just that."

The vote on the funding is part of a wider update to Cabinet on transport, including details that an expression of interest has been made into a Government scheme for a trial of hydrogen-powered buses.

The Mayor and Combined Authority has worked with bus operators and the hydrogen bus market to develop the expression of interest which has been sent to the Department for Transport. If successful, a full business case would need to be submitted to secure the funding.

The move comes after the region was named as the home for the UK's first Hydrogen Transport Hub, which will bring together Government, industry and academia to focus research, testing and trials of hydrogen across all modes of transport.

Photo credit: Tees Valley Combined Authority